

Farm Labor

"EQUAL RIGHTS FOR

AGRICULTURAL WORKERS"

Published by Citizens for Farm Labor, P.O. Box 1173, Berkeley, California

25¢ per copy; \$3.00 for twelve issues

Volume IV, Number 6: September, 1966



Henry Anderson
1966

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Cover: Cesar Estrada Chavez,
founder and president, National
Farm Workers Association; General
Secretary-Treasurer, United Farm
Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO.
Based on a photograph by Ernest Lowe.

Entire contents labor donated

REPORT TO THE SUBSCRIBER

The founding meeting of Citizens for Farm Labor was held on October 10, 1963, at 2417 California Street, Berkeley -- the home of Ernest and Grace Lowe. This historical tidbit is worth recalling at this time, on two counts:

1. Ernest Lowe currently has a one-man show at the De Young Museum, San Francisco, which he calls "Don't Cry For Me Babey" (you will understand the spelling when you see one of the photographs in the show). This is the finest visual presentation of the farm labor scene ever assembled, in our judgment -- and it is more than that, since Lowe is an artist with the tape recorder as well as the camera. If you have already seen this exhibition, go again. If you have not, be sure to go within the next few days. The show closes October 9. It is nothing but great.

2. The third anniversary of Citizens for Farm Labor falls a few days after you will receive this magazine. We will celebrate the event with a party at the home of William and Dorothy Kauffman, 78 El Camino Road, Berkeley (Ashby to Domingo, just a block from the Claremont Hotel, south half a block to El Camino). Saturday, October 15, 8:00 p.m. Live entertainment; all the beer you want -- or, if you prefer, the unfermented juice of the grape; \$1.00 per capita at the door, UFWOC organizers free.

* * * * *

A couple of days ago, we got a communication from The Texas Observer, a forthright fortnightly edited and published in Austin, Tex., by Ronnie Dugger. We were asked if we would accept an advertisement for a special reprint of Observer material on the farm workers' march from the Lower Rio Grande Valley to Austin. We have never carried advertisements in FARM LABOR, and don't propose to begin by taking the money of a deserving sister publication. Be advised herewith: the reprint in question, entitled "The Farm Workers Arise", is superb reporting -- even better, if we may say so, than any of the coverage we saw of the Delano-Sacramento march which, of course, inspired the Texas march. Copies may be obtained for 50¢ from The Texas Observer, 504 W. 24th St., Austin. While you are about it, if you have \$6.00 left after contributing to UFWOC and paying your dues to CFL, you should seriously consider subscribing to the Observer. It is somewhat comparable to the late, lamented liberal democrat and Pacific Scene, with an emphasis on Texas politics. Californians should be interested in Texas politics because they are similar in many ways to our own -- and both states may be thought of as microcosms of national trends. Texas, like California, and the nation, has an entrenched Democratic administration which grows more conservative as time goes by, largely a function of the fact that the Republicans offer nothing but an "alternative" which is even farther to the right. But some Texans are trying to forge a "new politics" which will come to more meaningful grips with the issues of the day. The Observer is the best -- indeed, the only -- way to keep abreast of these important developments.

* * * * *

The Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarians is sponsoring a conference called "Food for Thought: The Crisis in California Agriculture," beginning at 7:00 p.m., Friday, October 7, and continuing from 9:00 to 4:00 on Saturday, October 8. All sessions at the Berkeley Little Theater, Allston Way near Grove. Big farmers, little farmers, and some in between, UFWOC and CFL representatives, and others, will have their say.

* * * * *

NEXT CFL MEETING: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 8:00 P.M., 1529 BONITA ST., BERKELEY.
SPEAKERS: BILL REICH AND WENDY GOEPEL.

TO BUILD A UNION

by Henry Anderson

Part III

Introduction (1966)

With this issue, we complete the three-part serialization of our 1961 booklet, To Build A Union. This portion should not be read in isolation from the first two. A few more words about the background of this booklet, and the reasons why we think it worth reprinting, may be in order.

On June 30, 1961, George Meany, tired of jurisdictional wrangles involving the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, tired of paying AWOC's heavy legal expenses, tired of AWOC's failure to establish so much as a single self-supporting local, terminated all financial support of AWOC by the national AFL-CIO. He did not revoke AWOC's charter, but obviously he and everyone else in the hierarchy expected AWOC would soon go out of existence. It did not do so. The AWOC director of that time had some funds in reserve, with which office rent and other fixed expenses were met. A number of AWOC staff members stayed on the job, living on their unemployment insurance. For the first time, support was solicited from central labor bodies, and local, regional, and international unions. And the experience gave the author an opportunity to experiment with methods which had been forbidden as long as all decisions were made by "professionals." Volunteer organizers from student groups, civil rights groups, democratic socialist groups, were recruited to the farm labor movement. We began to organize along block, neighborhood, community lines, among stable agricultural workers, in sharp distinction to the former AWOC method of "strike now and organize some day," and of working very largely with transient single males. The local groups (which called themselves Area Councils) elected their own spokesmen, which the AWOC professionals had never permitted. We began issuing a bilingual newsletter to keep the various locals informed on matters of common interest. We became very much involved when a group of Filipino workers in Santa Cruz County went on strike (one of many fascinating parallels to events in Delano four years later), but by and large we placed our emphasis overwhelmingly on building for the long haul -- the slow process of building structures of communication and trust and mutual aid among farm workers, without asking them to run before they could walk.

In November, the AWOC volunteers were swept by rumors that Walter Reuther might be prepared to pick up the torch which George Meany had let drop. Rumor had it that Reuther's Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO had several million dollars of its own to "organize the unorganized," and was about to move into areas where Meany's department of organizing would not or could not do the job.

To Build A Union was written specifically for Reuther and the IUD, although some hundreds of copies were mimeographed and distributed to other persons we thought might be interested. It was intended to serve several purposes, such as:

1. To suggest some of the shortcomings of the old AWOC, as it had been conducted by the "professionals." We tried to be diplomatic about this, and named no names, out of consideration for the old AWOC leadership. Some reading between the lines is required for a full comprehension of the ways AWOC was ill-advised strategically, tactically, and administratively. Thus, for example, the call for "unorthodoxy" in Section XI-A was no mere platitude, as it might seem to an outsider, but a cry for an end to the endless backward-looking and reminiscing about organizing in the 1930's, which were among the hallmarks of the old AWOC leadership.

2. To suggest that, contrary to the off-the-record opinions of the AFL-CIO department of organization at that time, agricultural workers could be organized on an enduring basis, without waiting for coverage by collective bargaining legislation. But only if the right questions were asked, and answered in some coherent way.

3. To suggest that if the right questions were asked, and answered, the task was manageable in terms of time, cost, and personnel. In the original manuscript of To Build A Union, nine pages were devoted to a detailed discussion of budget, job descriptions, etc., in an effort to demonstrate that the organization of agriculture in California ^{would} by no means strain the capacities of the Industrial Union Department. This material is not included in the present reprint because of space limitations, and because the detailed suggestions are far less important than the general propositions.

4. To suggest that the jurisdictional problems in agriculture were, likewise, by no means beyond solution. There was a rather detailed discussion of the jurisdictional claims of organizations which were then in the arena, including the Amalgamated Meatcutters and the Packinghouse Workers. Much of this material has also been omitted, since it is of only historical interest. A good deal of material on the Teamsters has been retained, however, since it is still very much to the point.

* * * * *

Walter Reuther did not even acknowledge receipt of the booklet, much less respond to the ideas it contained. Nor did Victor Reuther, Nick Zonarich, A. Philip Randolph, or any of the other labor leaders to whom it was sent. Nothing more was ever heard of the rumor that Reuther was prepared for a showdown with Meany over the question of organizing the unorganized.

Undiscouraged, we went ahead. One of the proposals advanced in To Build A Union was implemented in December, 1961. We held a Farm Labor Organizing Conference in the little town of Strathmore, Tulare County. Some 200 agricultural workers, from various parts of the state, attended, and made decisions about the future of the movement. So far as we know, nothing like it has been attempted, before or since.

One of the decisions the workers made was to take up a collection (it amounted to \$317), and send a four-member delegation to the biennial AFL-CIO convention to try to get renewed financial support for AWOC. In our estimation, this decision was a disastrous mistake, but we argued in To Build A Union, and would argue still, that it is better for people to make their own decisions, even if they are mistakes, than for decisions to be made by others, even if they are infallible.

The four farm workers drove to the convention which, as usual, was being held among the fleshpots (Miami Beach). In an almost unprecedented action, the convention, in effect, rebuked George Meany, and asked for restitution of support to AWOC. At its next meeting, the AFL-CIO Executive Council complied. In January, 1962, the "professionals" moved back in to run AWOC. A new director, even "safer" than the old one, was appointed.

The professionals promptly abolished the use of volunteer organizers. They abolished the Area Councils. They abolished the newsletter. They abolished decision-making by members. They abolished grass-roots organizing. For all practical purposes, the resources of AWOC were turned over entirely to the re-election of Pat Brown and other Democratic candidates (who, interestingly enough, were mostly on record as opposing state farm labor legislation and favoring the bracero program).

In March, the author of To Build A Union was summarily discharged from the AWOC staff, although there can be no question he would soon have left of his own volition because of the killing and dismemberment of the dream.

In April, a man who dreamed that same dream, began a process of bringing it to life, patiently, quietly, in Delano. We had followed the career of Cesar Chavez before that, but have followed it ever since with something more than ordinary respect and interest -- with pride -- yes, and we do not mind saying, with love.

Although there are differences in detail, Cesar has been doing essentially what we proposed should be done and could be done, in To Build A Union, and done it far better than we could have hoped to do. He has given a truly fair trial to a philosophy of organizing which did not receive a fair trial at any time in the history of AWOC, or, for that matter, anywhere else in the Labor Establishment. The volunteer phase of AWOC, which was permitted a life of only a scant six months, might be characterized, in Martin Buber's phrase, as "an experiment which did not fail." Cesar Chavez's Farm Workers Association (we shall always think of it by its original name, just as its members do) would have to be described more affirmatively: an experiment which succeeded. He proved, to our satisfaction at least, that democratic organizations are possible, even in this highly bureaucratized and manipulative society, and that they are possible even among persons with the fewest advantages of income, legal protections, education, literacy, experience, or training. The importance of this accomplishment cannot be overstated. It speaks to everyone who despairs, everyone who is trapped in a ghetto, a multiversity, a suburb, a war, or any of the other forms of mindlessness and soullessness of our time.

* * * * *

To bring this story right down to the moment. The shortcomings of the Teamster philosophy of organizing, which inform many pages of To Build A Union, are still very much with us. The Teamsters' blustering talk of 1961 has become the reality of 1966. Chavez and his democratic union are locked in a life-and-death struggle with a union which considers democracy an unnecessary luxury -- if not a dirty word. That is, it is a matter of life and death for FWA. If the Teamsters are successful with their techniques of sweetheart contracts, Birchier collaboration, and outright strikebreaking, one fears it will be the end of FWA. If FWA wins, on the other hand, it will be nothing more than a pinprick on the vast and insensitive hide of the Teamsters Union, and that colossus will turn its attention back to the rest of its labor empire.

Secondly, more subtly, and of less immediate concern, FWA must some day conjure with the problems posed by the mixed blessing of AFL-CIO support -- the embrace which destroyed the accomplishments of AWOC's six-month volunteer period. The AFL-CIO has a new director of organization, and he talks a little differently from his predecessor, but George Meany is still at the helm of labor's ship of state, and we may be sure he has not become radicalized during the intervening five years.

The merger of FWA with AWOC was a kind of shotgun wedding, with the Teamsters' finger on one trigger and Di Giorgio's on the other. FWA merged with AWOC because it had to in order to survive the Teamster incursion. Otherwise, employer after employer -- beginning with Di Giorgio -- could and would have played FWA off against AWOC, splitting the legitimate farm labor vote, and enabling the Teamsters to slip in through the back door with spurious pluralities.

There have already been serious strains in the connubial bliss of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee -- for example, over FWA's insistence on continuing use of volunteers from civil rights and student groups. These tensions have been smoothed over in the face of the more urgent Teamster threat. But sooner or later, they are bound to come to the surface again. The FWA membership will have to deal with essentially the same question that the Strathmore Conference dealt with in December, 1961: is this to be just another AFL-CIO operation, or is it to be a vital, distinctive, self-actualizing movement, practical but idealistic, poor but independent? We hope the answer will be different from what it was at Strathmore.

* * * * *

FWA (UFWOC) won the Di Giorgio election, thereby confounding all the labor "experts" who did not believe that a movement largely of amateurs could possibly defeat a "professional," "meat and potatoes," "no nonsense" union. After the initial huzzahs, there has been a noticeable letdown among FWA's urban supporters, who tend to think they have done everything they will ever need to do.

The truth is that FWA needs support just as much as it ever did, if not more. There are still 30 strikes in progress, and a major boycott of Perelli-Minetti wines. The Teamsters still think they can annex agricultural workers to their empire. The Teamsters Union has enormous resources, and although FWA does not expect or hope to match these resources dollar for dollar, the challenge cannot be met by dedication alone.

We are informed that the AFL-CIO charter has thus far meant little or nothing to FWA in the way of material support. There are no prospects for War on Poverty or other grants without fatal strings attached. In short, FWA is dependent on the same sources of support it has had from the beginning: dues of its members; and contributions, without strings, from interested individuals and groups.

If you have some sacks of beans or flour lying around, they are needed in Delano, and if you have some friends who are similarly fixed, you might get up a car caravan. But it is our opinion that the most useful contribution you can make is coin of the realm. Nobody can know FWA's needs, moment by moment, so well as FWA itself, and FWA can get more for your money, buying in quantity, than you can get buying in small lots.

If you will forgive our Spanish, ¡V va la causa democratica de los obreros agricultores!

Long live the democratic farm labor movement!

* * * * *

And, now, to conclude our 1961 speculations on how To Build A Union....

VII. What Kind of Structure?

-5-

In this section, we shall discuss two structural considerations -- different but closely interrelated. These are the organizing drive, and the union which is to emerge from it.

A. The Union

It would be presumptuous to attempt to anticipate in detail the formal structure of the farm workers' union of the future. Any number of arrangements of branches, locals, councils, conferences, and so forth, are equally possible and equally acceptable. One cannot foresee the circumstances which might lead toward some particular arrangement.

One can, however, lay down certain principles which should undergird the exterior workings of whatever union structure evolves. They include:

1. Openness. There should be no secrets between the officers and rank-and-file of the union. The advantages of openness in policy-making and execution outweigh what may sometimes seem to be the dangers of information "leaks." The advantages are nothing less than the morale of the membership and thus the very life of the organization. It might conceivably give a certain amount of "aid and comfort" to the organizing committee's opponents to know, for example, how much of its funds it had spent, and how much remained. But this risk would be far less dangerous than the risks to members' confidence if such information were withheld. They want to know such things, they are entitled to know such things, and many of them will wander away and not be back if knowing such things is denied them.
2. Honesty. This goes without saying.
3. Anti-discrimination. This goes without saying..
4. Democracy. This concept requires explanation.

As we shall here use the term, democracy is not something added after the fact of union-building, like a coat of new paint over old mortar. It is either mixed with the very mortar of union-building, or the union will probably never become truly democratic. The "style" of a union -- or for that matter, of any organization -- is largely set by the manner in which it is created. If it is formed by caudillos who do not really represent the ideas and feelings of those whom they "lead", the "leaders" will live forever in fear of their followers, and this fear will be passed on to their successors and to their successors' successors.

What does democracy mean in the context of union-building? The same things it means (or should mean) in any other context. It means that one who is in a position to make decisions affecting the lives of other people should be answerable to those people. It means a faith that human beings, confronted with possible alternative courses of action, and necessary

background information, are capable of making sensible choices. It means a faith that human beings, having made such choices, are capable of assuming responsibility for the consequences -- even if the choices prove to be wrong, as sometimes they surely will. Democracy means scrupulous care that the people whose lives are going to be affected by the decisions in any given area shall have the opportunity to examine all the alternatives available, and shall have the opportunity to choose between those alternatives.

Democracy must thus be distinguished not only from totalitarianism or dictatorship, which is the overt form of authoritarianism, but also from managerialism, which is the covert form of the same thing. There is no qualitative difference between a society -- or a union -- in which a "maximum leader" tells people what to do, outright, and a society -- or a union -- in which the "experts" manipulate people toward some predetermined conclusion by manipulating the information and alternatives provided them. From the standpoint of democracy and non-democracy, there is nothing to choose between the uncontested elections in an iron curtain country and the uncontested elections in the American Legion, American Medical Association -- or a union.

But choices, as such, are still not a sufficient condition for democracy as we are here attempting to define it. Freedom implies not only choices, but choices invested with content and meaning. A choice between candidates about whom one knows nothing is not a meaningful choice. A choice between candidates who think alike is not a meaningful choice. A choice between voting for an incumbent union official and merely voting against him (or not voting at all) is not really a meaningful choice. A choice between voting for the recommendation of a resolutions committee or negotiating committee and merely voting against it (or not voting at all) is not a meaningful choice.

The process of building a democratic union requires the continual review of alternatives. More than that, it requires plausible and viable alternatives. What is the meaning of voting against an unopposed candidate, resolution, or contract that he doesn't like? How can he register what he is for, what he believes in? He cannot, unless all the alternative possibilities have been articulated, argued, and placed on the ballot together with the officially "favored" alternative.

The process must therefore be carried a step farther. To make sure the arguments have been heard, it is necessary that those who plan and conduct union meetings and elections and other decision-making functions not only permit the emergence of alternatives, but cultivate them, and encourage their unfettered presentation.

To representatives of traditional organizational thinking -- which includes most trade union leaders -- these propositions doubtless conjure up visions of divisiveness and threats to the very existence of the organization. And, given a tradition of non-democracy, they are probably right. Where leaders have come to power by stifling or destroying the opposition, they dare not relax or their power will be taken from them by the same sorts of means. If opposition is tolerated, the chances are it will be cast in the same pattern as the leadership from which it has learned its

organizational lessons. It will seek to destroy the old leadership rather than merely supplant it. Since old leaders do not care to be destroyed any more than anyone else does, they run their organizations with the proverbial iron hand, and do not tolerate genuine opposition.

This is why it is vital that the "tone" or "style" of the organization be set in a democratic mode from the very outset. It is extremely difficult to change later on. But in an organization where disparate viewpoints are encouraged from the beginning, there is no point in conspiracies, character-assassination, treachery, and the other hallmarks of a non-democratic political "style". Everyone knows that he has as good a chance as everyone else to have his point of view adopted without such tactics.

At every stage of the farm labor union-building process, there should be provision for and solicitation of the presentation of different viewpoints regarding strategy and tactics. Let us assume, for example, that a local of the farm workers' union in San Joaquin County confronts the autumn harvest season with limited resources. A reasonable assumption. Let us assume that the local's officers feel that, all things considered, the bulk of the resources should be spent on trying to obtain a contract with the tomato grower's association. They should, at that point, stop and ask themselves, "Are there any alternatives?" There are. Grapes. Walnuts. Perhaps others. An effort should then be made to find spokesmen for the proposition that primary emphasis should be placed on grapes, or walnuts, or whatever other reasonable alternatives there might be. These various arguments should be laid before the people likely to be affected by the decision: that is, the farm workers of the upper San Joaquin Valley. Only on that basis, should tactical details be formulated by the local's executive committee.

Some will protest, "But you just can't run a union that way. If the tomato-pickers lost out, they'd refuse to support the grape-cutters, and if the grape-cutters lost out, they wouldn't lift a finger for the tomato-pickers." If the above hypothetical case were a small "experiment in democracy" in the midst of a long tradition of authoritarianism, the pragmatic objection might be valid. But if one begins at the very beginning with a genuine cultivation of the democratic style, the prophets of non-democracy will be confounded. Adults "pick up their marbles and go home" only if they are afraid there is going to be no game tomorrow. If the farm labor union is authentically democratic, ^{neither} the grape-cutters, the walnut-shakers, nor anyone else in the union need ever fear that their chance of the moment is the only chance they will get.

This leads us to another essential characteristic of union democracy as we are here comprehending it. It is not enough to say that democratic unionism recognizes the right of minority opinion. It is not enough merely to acquiesce in this right, to tolerate it. In the really democratic union, minority opinion is cherished as the very precious thing it is. It is actively protected and even developed. Holders of viewpoints which may be, for the moment, in a minority are not only permitted but encouraged to organize on behalf of their view -- to form a caucus, a committee, a party, a tendency.

Under such circumstances, it would be absurd for the tomato-pickers or grape-cutters or any other "losers" to resort to sulking, rancor, or withdrawal. There would be so much they could accomplish by continuing to work within the organization and so little they could accomplish by bad will or backstabbing.

Counterfeit democracy or quasi-democracy is indeed a grotesque condition which may yield grotesque results. To convene a meeting of farm workers who do not know one another and ask them to elect officers is foolish. Bernard Shaw spoke truly when he said, "The only cure for the failings of democracy is more democracy." But by more democracy he did not mean more foolishness. He presumably meant more systematic development of means for conveying full information to the people, more systematic cultivation of opportunities for choosing between live alternatives, more systematic development of means for minorities to try, publicly, to convert the majority.

Unions do not become democratic by the U.S. Government passing a law and saying, "You shall now be democratic." Democracy is not something which can be grafted onto an already growing plant. Democracy is a root. If you place it in the right kind of soil, and water and feed it well, and pull out the tares, and nurture it, it will grow. But you can kill it, even before you plant it, by improper preparation. Which brings us to a discussion of the pre-union, or organizing committee, phase of union-building.

B. The organizing drive

1. An organizing drive is frequently likened to a military operation. In this paper, for example, we have employed such terms as "campaign," "beachhead," "logistics," "supply lines," etc. But the analogy should not be overworked. Military campaigns imply military minds, and military minds imply authoritarianism, a confidence in violence, and other characteristics which need not and should not enjoy a place in constructing a union. The excuse, of course, is that authoritarianism is efficient. It may be efficient in laying a mine field, capturing an enemy anti-tank gun, or launching a missile. One wonders if it is efficient in gaining more constructive objectives. And even if it were, one wonders if such yields of authoritarianism would be worth what they would eventually cost.

All this ^{is} by way of saying that the "style" and structure of the organizing committee are inseparable from and no less important than those of the union itself. The type of union which will result, which can result, is going to be limited by the type of organizing drive which is conducted. One cannot reasonably hope to build democratic structures by anti-democratic means; honest structures by dishonest means; affirmative structures by destructive means. The following minimum provisions should be built into the organizing drive:

a. Regular opportunities for the rank-and-file to communicate information and to express its views on the conduct of the drive, and to hear the information and opinions of the organizing staff.

b. Regular financial reports to the rank-and-file.

c. Maximum opportunity for the rank-and-file to select representatives for negotiating committees, legislative testimony, and as many other activities of the drive as possible.

2. Selection and training of staff members. The appointment of organizing committee personnel should be put on some systematic basis. Standards should be set up -- job qualifications for technical personnel, organizers, chief stewards, even for office personnel. Hiring and firing may ultimately be the responsibility of a single person -- the general director, office manager, organizational director, or whoever -- but such decisions should not be made without consultation with others.

The question of recruitment and appointment of staff members cannot really be separated from the question of training. The "sink or swim" approach mentioned earlier is not fair to anyone concerned. Every staff member should serve an "apprenticeship" of several months, in the course of which he would receive orientation from the technical staff and field staff. Gradually, he would be given assignments involving more and more independence. This "apprenticeship" would be a boon to the fledgling organizer. It would also have the advantage of providing the only realistic basis on which a prospective staff member could be evaluated by his peers: his performance on the job.

3. Staff members of the organizing committee should have regular opportunities to exchange information and views with one another and with the committee's directors.

The infrequency of staff meetings in AWOC can perhaps be understood in terms of the far-flung geographic dispersion of the organizers. A future organizing committee might not be so widely dispersed, at least for the first year or two. But even if it were, the importance of regular staff meetings is such that they should be held regardless of distances -- if they are the right kind of meetings. The following qualifications should be met. Meetings should not be mere formalities but should deal with significant policy questions currently before the organization, and those likely to arise within the foreseeable future. All meetings should have carefully thought-out agendas. At every meeting, provision should be made for every staff member to express himself on any matter of concern to him.

During seasons which are not particularly busy, the entire staff should probably meet once a week. During busy seasons, it may not be feasible for the whole staff to meet so frequently. But even during this time, the following steps should be taken to keep the staff as closely knit as possible under the circumstances: (a) regional or sub-regional staff meetings of all the organizers working in a given area; (b) regular weekly meetings of all the staff members remaining at the drive's headquarters; (c) continuous field visits and "cross-fertilization" by the Director of Field Operations, Organizational Director, or whatever title might be given to this crucial position in the new organizing committee.

4. National organizing committee

Although, at the outset, any organizing drive in agriculture will likely have to be restricted geographically, it should function with at least the overview and advice of a national organizing committee. Such a committee should include representatives of established trade unions which have, within recent memory, succeeded in organizing the unorganized. They need

1. See Section VIII-A of this essay, in the last issue of Farm Labor. (Ed.)

not have been involved in any activities related to agriculture. The all-important qualification for membership on this committee should be practical knowledge of how to go about organizing people. In addition to the wisdom and experience such a committee could put at the disposal of the organizing committee which was actually on the firing line, it would serve these useful purposes: (a) provide a concrete demonstration that the farm labor problem is a problem for all labor, and that labor is aware of this truth; (b) anticipate the day, which is certain to come eventually, when the farm labor organizing drive will move out from its "beachhead" and become national in scope.

If the organizing drive is supported by a single international union, rather than by the AFL-CIO as a whole or by a combination of international unions (e.g., IUD), this proposal for a National Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee may seem out of place. I do not believe that it is. Whatever might be the international union which exercised jurisdiction in this field, however big and wealthy and powerful it might be, it should be big enough, in the other sense of the term, to entertain suggestions from and to work with other arms of the labor movement on this most complex and immense organizing task.

4. The equivalent of the National Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee should be created at the state level, in each state in which the drive operates. As in the case of NAWOC, the state committees would not necessarily have any financial or other control over the field organizing (although this is a conceivable arrangement). The primary purpose would be to get as much of the labor movement as possible involved in the organization of this last unorganized industry. Such involvement would be a two-sided coin of great worth. The benefit to the farm labor drive would be matched by the benefit to the whole labor movement of becoming involved in a fight for elementary social and economic justice. The effect could be as revitalizing as the great drives of the 1930's.

5. There have been many previous attempts to organize agricultural workers. It is a tragedy that no effort has been made to profit by the lessons that leaders and members of these earlier drives must have learned, and could teach. Any future organizing committee should call an Advisory Conference, to which veterans of previous farm labor organizing campaigns would be invited. With a little spadework, it should be possible to locate both leaders and rank-and-filers of such campaigns, dating back to efforts of the AFL in California in the 1910's. The Advisory Conference would have no policy-making powers, but its suggestions would be taken into consideration by the organizing committee. Furthermore, the Advisory Conference should not be a one-time affair, but should be subject to periodic recall, for analysis of new problems of the present in the light of experiences of the past.

What is more, special conferences should be called from time to time to which an even wider array of persons interested in farm labor organization might be invited. For example, many people representing church groups -- e.g., Migrant Ministry, AFSC, and Catholic Rural Life Conference -- have had sustained and intimate contact with farm workers -- more sustained and intimate, in fact, than representatives of the labor movement have had.

The problems of union-building should be fully aired at these conferences, with no strictures laid upon criticism of present policies or recommendations for new directions. Once again, of course, the organizing committee itself would in no way be bound by these recommendations, but it could certainly be expected to take them into account. And, once again, the value of such discussion would lie not only in the value of the ideas which might be presented to the organizing committee, but also in the sense of involvement which would be communicated to all participants. If it is desirable to have labor-at-large regard the farm labor drive as its drive, it would be even more desirable to have society-at-large regard the farm labor drive as something in which it has a direct stake -- as it does.

1 Such a conference was organized by the author and other volunteers, a month after these lines were written. (Ed.)

X. What kind of strategy?

Some persons with long experience in the labor movement reject advance planning on the grounds that "blueprints" are unworkable in an organizing drive. That is a straw-man argument. No one is suggesting a "blueprint" in the sense of saying, "On November 13 we do this; on November 14 we do that; and on November 15 we do such-and-so." Day-to-day events, which cannot be predicted, shape day-to-day activities, which hence cannot be pre-ordered in detail.

But there is a compelling necessity for some sort of rational, broad strategy, within the framework of which the organizers and the technical staff can fit their activities on a fluid basis. Without any such framework at all, staff members merely drift from day to day, and some grow so frustrated they drift out of the movement entirely.

We have already raised several of the sorts of questions which must be dealt with in any coherent organizational strategy: who is to be organized? where? when? for what purposes? Let us now consider some other questions of the sort which must be answered in the formulation of a strategy for the building of a farm labor union.

A. Should organizing be undertaken on a crop-by-crop basis? If so, what crops should be organized first?

1. We have already spoken of the monopoly crop-areas to be found in California, and the possible advantages of concentrating on those at the outset. In choosing a "strategic" crop, other questions should be examined as well.

2. What are the respective merits and demerits of concentrating upon staple crops as opposed to luxury crops? Let us take potatoes, as an example of a staple crop, and asparagus as an example of a luxury crop. It might be expected that the organizing drive could gain a certain amount of leverage from the fact that consumers are going to continue to demand potatoes -- a staff of life in our culture -- and will presumably pay more for them if that is necessary to confer fair labor standards upon potato workers. People do not have to have asparagus, or artichokes, or Brussels sprouts, or strawberries, or mushrooms, or olives, or a number of other luxury crops in which California specializes. In the face of unionization, growers of such crops might conceivably stop growing them.

On the other hand, there is leverage to be gained from the fact most of these specialty items are crops in which California growers enjoy a total or effective monopoly over the entire nation's production. Few staple items are concentrated in California. In fact, they are National staples precisely because they are relatively easy to grow, and are grown in a large number of different areas.

Still another argument which can be raised on the subject of organizing staple vs. luxury crops has to do with the role of public opinion. The growers would undoubtedly attempt to turn community sentiment against the potato workers, with lurid images of "ruthless labor goons jeopardizing essential crops." They would not be able to capitalize on quite this type of propaganda in the case of asparagus and other luxury crops.

3. Another strategic question which should be passed upon before organizing activity began in any crop is: what are the pros and cons of organizing workers in a perishable crop as opposed to a non-perishable crop? Let us consider, for example, strawberries as opposed to walnuts. Neither is a staple crop, so there is little to choose between them on that score. But strawberry fields must be picked almost every day or berries become overripe. Not only are those berries lost, but the plants may stop bearing for the remainder of the season. In the face of any unionization efforts, strawberry growers would naturally try to get as much advantage as they could from the specter of "foodstuffs spoiling in the fields." The importance of this advantage should not be minimized. Walnut growers, in contrast, cannot use this appeal to popular emotion. Their product will keep for weeks, hanging on the trees, or lying on the ground, without undergoing any appreciable deterioration.

But all the arguments are not on the side of tackling walnuts before strawberries. Since walnut growers could withstand a siege of some weeks before they began to worry, any organizing efforts which involved strike action would have to cope with the many serious problems of extended strikes. They require a great deal of planning, they cost a great deal of money, they entail a great deal of risk that the membership will lose its zeal and esprit de corps. In strawberries, however, if a strike were called, it would very likely be decided one way or the other within a matter of days. This is another of the strategic considerations the organizing committee should take into account in advance, particularly if it is straitened financially -- as it is almost certain to be.

4. Let us consider still another factor which should be evaluated in devising crop strategy: the condition of the industry. As we have stated earlier, growers of many commodities are nearly as badly disorganized as their workers. As a consequence, even the growers of some of California's monopoly crops are in economic difficulty. This cannot be a decisive consideration to the union, obviously. Probably a full 90% of the growers' financial tears are crocodile tears. But the union cannot afford to overlook the possible effects of tears. Even if they are crocodile tears, they often have a power to move the uninitiated. It is not out of the question that agricultural employers, taking their claims of poverty to the general public, to legislators, and to government agencies, could obtain preferential anti-labor legislation and administrative rulings even beyond what they already have. Until the union is in a position to counter this sort of thing with effective political action of its own, it might do well to focus upon crops which are doing well financially and which promise to continue to do well financially. Cherries are an example of such a crop; tokay grapes are another example; there are others. They are no secret. Everybody in the industry knows about them. Growers of such crops would make laughing stocks of themselves if their public relations rested on claims of poverty.

5. The following consideration is closely related to the foregoing. Most of the crops which are relatively secure financially at the present time are secure because the growers have organized themselves in sensible ways. California grows all of the country's avocados. That in itself is no guarantee of success for avocado growers. But they have also formed the Calavo cooperative, which is effective because almost all avocado growers belong to it. California also grows all the country's almonds. Virtually all almond growers belong to the California Almond Growers Exchange. The same is true of raisin growers. California has a monopoly. Almost all the growers belong to the Sun-maid cooperative. The same is true of walnut growers. California has a monopoly. Almost all walnut growers belong to the California Walnut Growers Exchange, a cooperative which markets its product under the Diamond brand name. In addition to cooperatives, growers have at their disposal, if they care to use them, state and federal agricultural marketing agreement acts, which provide for quantity and quality controls, among other purposes, if two-thirds of the producers of a given commodity vote for them. Approximately thirty of these marketing agreements are in effect in California at the present time. They cover such products as cling peaches, lemons (a California monopoly product), dried figs (still another California monopoly), prunes (still another), plums (still another), pears, apples, winter lettuce, Brussels sprouts (a monopoly), lima beans, and oranges. These arrangements are important to the farm labor movement in that they have tended to produce something approaching stability in the industries covered. They are also important in the battle for public sympathy in the following ways: growers try to depict themselves as the last bastion of liberty, of rugged individualism, of free enterprise. They try to depict unions as destroying these qualities. The marketing orders we have mentioned are far more monopolistic, far more authoritarian, far more inflexible, far less individualistic, far less "free" than even a bad labor union. A grower may be fined \$500 every time he tries to sell more than he has been allotted under the marketing order. He may have voted against the order, but he is bound by it just the same. What kind of arguments against the principle of unionism can growers seriously raise under these circumstances?

These are some of the sorts of strategic questions which should be raised -- these are some of the types of pros and cons which the organizing committee should weigh and decide upon before activity begins in any crop.

B. What types of farms?

The Chairman of the Western Conference of Teamsters has publicly scoffed at the AWOC for "trying to organize three men farms," and has announced that if and when his union moves into the farm labor field, it will confine itself to California's 14,000 industrialized farms. One is not sure where this gentleman obtained his information about industrialized farms, and even less sure on what basis he formed his judgments about AWOC. But the question he raises is an important one.

1 Einar Mohn, in 1961 (Ed.)

It might be maintained that small and medium-sized farms are easier to "pick off" than huge factories in the field. On the other hand, it might be maintained that bellwethers of the industry should be the primary targets -- that when the California Packing Corporation, for example, falls, the whole "right-to-work" arch in agriculture will fall. Against the first proposition, it could well be argued that family farmers are, in effect, farm workers, and an alliance rather than enmity should be cultivated. There is also the formidable role which public opinion could play if the organizing drive were to concentrate on "the little fellow."

But, at the same time, one can point to historical experience which suggests that the "giant of the industry" approach does not work, at least in agriculture. This strategy was tried for two and a half years in the DiGiorgio strike of the late 1940's. It ended in total defeat for the union. If a colossal corporation really wants to, it can ignore a union almost indefinitely, writing off its entire crop if necessary. Reserves, tax rebates, income from other corporate activities, and support from allied industries will probably enable it to outlast any farm workers' union in an endurance contest.

Against both of the above propositions, it could well be argued that the farm workers' union should not focus upon any particular size of farm, but should focus on workers, until the point is reached that all growers--large and small, of a given crop--or all the growers large and small of a given area--can be addressed simultaneously.

In any event, this is another of the types of strategic questions which should be grappled with by the organizing committee very early in the game.

C. Categories of Workers

We have dealt at length, in Section V, with the several disparate categories of workers in the farm labor force, and have reviewed the arguments for and against concentrating organizing efforts upon one or another type. This question is intertwined with the question of organizing by crop. Assume that it has been concluded braceros are well nigh impossible to organize. This would limit the crops and areas in which the drive could reasonably hope to operate effectively. For example, it would rule out tomatoes in all areas. It would rule out the whole Imperial Valley and San Diego County. It rules out strawberries. It rules out lettuce. It rules out a number of crops which might be considered highly "organizable" from every other standpoint. If one began with the opposite assumption -- i.e., that the bracero program would be properly administered and that braceros would then become the most organizable of farm workers -- one would come to opposite conclusions about the types of crops and areas in which to operate.

Or, assume that one felt the Anglo migrants who call themselves "rubber tramps" were the most likely group around which to begin building a farm labor union. One would then search for crop-areas in which rubber tramps are prominent: San Joaquin County cherries; Yolo County apricots; Lake County pears; Butte County olives; etc.

If the organizing committee decided that union building could best proceed on a foundation of the "home guard," still different conclusions about crops would follow. In this event, the organizing committee would probably not choose any particular crop emphasis, since the "home guard" does not dominate single crops at a time, in the manner of braceros or rubber tramps, but is important to a number of different crops simultaneously. To concentrate upon any one of these crops would, in effect, split the "home guard"--a consequence hardly to be wished.

D. Sequence of goals

Still another strategic question which might be explored by the organizing committee before the battle, so to speak, rather than in its midst, is this: what is the first objective to be sought: the second? the third? and so forth. For example, does one seek union recognition from the very beginning of bargaining with employers, or does one seek wage increases first and union recognition later? Or does one seek job security before either of them?

I only raise the question here. I shall not attempt to answer it -- at least in the foregoing terms -- because I do not believe it is the function of the organizing committee itself to negotiate with agricultural employers, but only to organize workers to negotiate on their own behalf.

This proposition brings us logically to a consideration of organizing methods.

XI. What Kinds of Organizing Methods?

A. The need for unorthodoxy

The farm labor organizing committee must be prepared for the possibility -- it is not a certainty, but it is a possibility -- that at the outset it may have to be concerned with problems quite outside the orthodox orbit of unionism. So much the worse for orthodoxy. The nearest thing to a flat statement we shall lay down in this paper is the following. Farm workers will not be organized by hackneyed and unimaginative methods. (Nor will white collar workers or any of the rest of the unorganized.) If the farm labor organizing committee concentrates upon migratory workers, it may find they are immediately concerned more about their children's health and education than about job conditions. If the farm labor organizing committee concentrates upon the residents of "shoestring communities," it may discover that these people are less concerned about their wages than they are about an urban redevelopment project which is about to wipe out all their homes. However "unorthodox" the concerns, these are the concerns with which an organizing drive must start. Other concerns will follow, and eventually, of course, the usual union objectives of improved wages and working conditions, job security, union recognition, and the like, will loom large.

B... Following are a few of the sorts of arrangements which might give agricultural workers the opportunity to become personally involved in the solution of problems interesting and important to them.

1. Housing committee
 - a. Maintain a file of farm workers who wish either to rent or buy, together with information about their financial situation, number of children, and other pertinent facts.
 - b. Maintain a listing of properties for rent, lease, or sale, in which agricultural workers might be interested.
 - c. Attempt by all appropriate means to reduce housing barriers based on such irrelevant factors as race, national origin, religion, language, or occupation.
 - d. Assist farm workers in fighting unfair evictions, condemnation proceedings, etc.
2. Health and welfare committee
 - a. Set up a credit union for farm workers.
 - b. Attempt to arrange group health and accident insurance for members.
 - c. Manage an emergency fund, to be used for compassionate purposes when there is little likelihood of repayment.
 - d. Operate a clearing house of information about the availability of family counselling, categorical and general assistance, and other social services in the community, and how to obtain these rights.
3. Social and recreational committee
 - a. Organize dances, picnics, etc.
 - b. Operate a book and magazine exchange.
 - c. Arrange for the showing of motion pictures which can be obtained free of charge from film libraries.
4. Education committee
 - a. Issue a local newsletter for members.
 - b. Arrange discussions, forums, etc.
 - c. Arrange for English and citizenship classes.
 - d. Publish informational pamphlets on Social Security, workmen's compensation, etc.
5. Political action committee
 - a. Register farm workers to vote.
 - b. Arrange "meet the candidate" meetings.
 - c. Conduct meetings for the discussion of political issues of the day.
 - d. Organize letter-writing campaigns and other forms of legislative advocacy when the members have coalesced around a given position on a given issue.
6. Finance committee
 - a. Attempt to ensure that members remain current in their dues.
 - b. Organize special fund-raising activities, such as rummage sales, bazaars, fiestas, etc.

7. Membership committee
 - a. Recruit new members.
 - b. Initiate members into rights and responsibilities of membership.
 - c. Maintain membership records.
8. Membership service committee
 - a. Workmen's compensation cases.
 - b. Disability insurance cases.
 - c. Labor commissioner cases.
 - d. Public Law 78 cases.
 - e. Industrial Welfare Commission cases.
 - f. Other.
9. Community service committee
 - a. United Crusade, etc.
 - b. Assistance to other unions on strike.
 - c. Other.
10. Mutual aid committee
 - a. Buy basic foodstuffs and other commodities cooperatively.
 - b. Perhaps grow certain foodstuffs cooperatively.
 - c. Arrange canning bees, etc.
 - d. Maintain a file of members' exchangeable skills: auto-mobile repair, haircutting, carpentry, etc.
11. Ladies' Auxiliary
 - a. Conduct cooperative nursery school, or day care center.
 - b. Organize a baby-sitting exchange.
 - c. Organize an exchange of children's clothing, toys, etc.
 - d. Playground equipment.
 - e. Rummage sales (in cooperation with Finance Committee).
 - f. Pot-luck suppers (in cooperation with Social and Recreational Committee).
 - g. Cooperative buying (in cooperation with Mutual Aid Committee).
12. Employment committee
 - a. Train workers in new agricultural skills, or improve the skills they already possess.
 - b. Organize crews of experienced, dependable workers.
 - c. Arrange placement of these crews.
 - d. Arrange car pools for transportation to and from work.
 - e. Assist in educating workers on the history, meaning, and problems of unionism and union membership.
 - f. Assist in training field stewards.
 - g. Assist in handling job grievances.
 - h. Assist in drafting wage and working condition demands.
 - i. Assist in negotiating contracts, if opportunity arises.
 - j. Assist in strike action, if necessity arises.

Some of these functions would have to be shared with the organizing committee until groups of rank-and-filers were strong enough and stable enough to proceed as local unions or the equivalent. This is particularly true of the functions of what we have called the "employment committee".

But the overall organizing committee should constantly seek for a maximum of participation by rank-and-filers in such activities, not only because this is the way to build a strong union, but because it is the way to build a union which is strong in more places. Every time an organizer can delegate a responsibility to a rank-and-file member, and know it will get done, he has freed himself to go forth and organize more rank-and-file members.

Professional organizers are really only catalysts. The bulk of the organizing, particularly in a jurisdiction as vast and sprawling as agriculture, must be done by union members who expect no other recompense than the priceless recompense of seeing people obtain justice, and develop their human potential. For financial reasons, it is unlikely that the ratio of organizers to unorganized farm workers will be more than one to 500 in any given area or crop within the foreseeable future. It is virtually out of the question to think that a single organizer could maintain personal contact with 500 widely scattered persons, process their complaints, and so forth. The professional organizer might be likened to a precinct leader, who, more than anything else, supervises and coordinates the activities of the blockcaptains and block workers in his territory.

The analogy is not too imprecise, particularly if the organizing committee decides to concentrate upon the home guard. An organizer might be assigned to Stockton's East End, Boggs Tract, St. Linus district, or "Dogpatch." Through house calls, he would be expected to locate farm workers who were sufficiently interested in organizing to hold a house meeting in their own homes. The initial house meetings might be very small -- six or eight or ten relatives, friends, and neighbors. In the first round of house meetings, some workers who were more concerned than others might be expected to emerge. These workers -- perhaps only one or two per block -- would receive special attention and training from the organizer. From then on, they would serve as block captains, lieutenants, or whatever they might be called. They would organize subsequent house meetings. Periodically, the several block captains together with the professional organizer would arrange for neighborhood-wide meetings. Periodically, the volunteer organizers and rank-and-filers from the various neighborhoods would meet in community-wide meetings -- the equivalent of a local union, although it might not be called that for a long while. And, similarly, there should be coordination between communities and regions.

C. The helpers

We have remarked that, in the course of time, the bulk of the organization of a farm workers' union will have to be done by the farm workers themselves -- and should be. But we have also suggested that, for the present, certain prerequisites for self-organization are missing -- otherwise farm workers would have organized themselves long ago. The qualities which are known as "social" -- group awareness, mutual purposes, division of labor, claims and expectations, roles and statuses -- have largely been denied agricultural workers. Even those who live in close physical proximity, as in the "shoestring communities" of the San Joaquin Valley, are often strangers to one another.

A labor union is not something instinctive. It is a relatively advanced form of human association. A lasting labor union presupposes a period of "training" on the part of the people concerned -- training in teamwork, training in self-discipline, training in the arts of relating with other people in a common effort. In a word, the task of union building in agriculture awaits certain preliminaries: the breaking down of atomization and alienation, to begin with; and, then, the development of mutual awareness and trust.

The question is, who shall ^{agricultural workers} prepare for social participation, so that the concept of a farm labor union may begin to take on urgency and meaning? To some extent, these interstices are being filled in a few parts of California by "community organizers" with a religious or philanthropic orientation. The American Friends Service Committee in California supports a farm labor project, with two representatives in the field. The Migrant Ministry of the National Council of Churches maintains a number of representatives, some of whom might legitimately be called organizers. The Bishops Committee for Migrant Workers is currently underwriting a modest pilot project among the "shoestring communities" in the vicinity of Stockton, California. Three or four volunteers from Berkeley and other urban centers are at this moment doing organizing work among farm laborers in San Joaquin County, without organizational support, but simply because they wish to play a part in this particularly accessible phase of the world-wide task of human development.

But useful and laudable as such efforts are, they tend to be restricted in purpose, sporadic in application, and unclear as to ultimate goals. For the most part, they do not point toward any permanent institutional framework within which the process of organization and development might proceed. And, to a large extent, they are unwilling or unable to foster or even to be associated with a movement which takes a militant turn, because of their religious orientation, because of their dependency upon the good will of growers, or both.

No one could do the job of pre-union organizing so well as union organizers themselves -- if they were the right kind of organizers. The qualifications are exacting and hard to find. Among other things, such qualifications include the following: (1) desire, not to "serve" disinherited humanity, but to become a member of this portion of humanity; (2) freedom from other commitments for an extended period of time; (3) indifference to the orthodox career goals of our society -- income, security, prestige; (4) passion for the possibilities of the human personality as it unfolds in social contexts.

Human development is a two-way street. Those who liberate others from their bonds -- of self-doubt, ignorance, loneliness, indignity, or whatever -- liberate themselves. This is one of the rewards of working for the farm labor movement. But it is not comprehensible to everyone, since it cannot be reduced to the terms by which rewards are usually measured in our civilization.

One of the very mundane questions an organizing committee in agriculture must answer is, "How much should we pay the organizers?" In my opinion, if salaries were to go above \$4,000 or so, the disparity between the organizers and those to be organized would become so bizarre that the organizing process would be hampered. Yet experienced organizers may not accept the subtle rewards, mentioned above, as compensation for salary slashes of 50 percent or more from what they are now receiving.

The organizing committee should be prepared to consider unorthodoxies in this respect as well as many others we have been discussing. America is not an unrelieved wasteland of grey flannel suits. Many competent and intelligent young people -- for example, graduate students in the social sciences -- want to make themselves useful to humanity, don't expect to make any money at it, and lack only opportunities. Tens of thousands of people have volunteered for the Peace Corps. Only a tiny fraction can be accepted. Among the remainder are doubtless many qualified men and women who could be shown that there is a job of human development to be done in rural America as important in its way as that in rural Ghana or Colombia. As a matter of fact, without even attempting a systematic recruitment program, AWOC has attracted five full-time volunteer workers who are not even reimbursed for their expenses. An AWOC organizer-training program, which would develop skills with application beyond the farm labor movement, would be an added inducement to volunteers.

Volunteer organizers pose certain problems of their own. Most of these problems can be reduced to that of discipline. Since volunteers do not receive the privileges of professional organizers (salary, expenses, fringe benefits, etc.), how can they be required to meet the responsibilities of professional organizers? They can't -- except to the extent their own dedication accomplishes this. But the occasional problems of indiscipline and irresponsibility among volunteer organizers are not insoluble. One solution lies in initial selection. In a great majority of cases, thoughtful screening should result in the selection of volunteers with built-in "gyroscopes" to keep them on an even keel without the necessity of more orthodox organization controls. This careful initial selection should be followed by a period of orientation, training, and "apprenticeship" even more thoroughgoing than that discussed earlier in connection with the professional staff.

XII. Support With What Strings?

There are those who feel that any farm workers' union would be preferable to no union at all, and are prepared to applaud the entry of anyone into the farm labor field. Implicit in much of the present essay is the belief that there is a great deal to choose between various types of unions, that it is not necessary to acquiesce meekly in just any kind of farm labor union, and that there is much one can do to help ensure that it will be the right kind of union. In this same vein, it makes a difference -- an important difference -- where the support for the organizing committee comes from. Those who care so much about the organization of farm workers that they are ready to welcome support from everyone and anyone who is willing to contribute do not serve the movement as well as they think. Following are a few of the considerations which should be taken into account in any full discussion of possible sources of support for a farm workers' organizing committee.

A. It is unrealistic to suppose farm workers will be able to build a union without assistance. The great industrial unions of the 1930's would not have been organized without the help of outside forces, most notably the United Mine Workers. But farm workers, not one whit less than the industrial workers of the 1930's, deserve a union of their own. Nobody proposed, in the 1930's, that just because the UMW poured its organizers and millions of dollars into the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, that the UMW had jurisdiction over the industry. It makes no better sense for people now to suggest that the only hope for farm workers is that they be taken over by some international union whose principal claim is that it is wealthy while farm workers are not.

Agricultural workers are not children. They are not incompetents. When a union has been built, they are entirely capable of guiding it -- which is to say, capable of guiding their own destinies.

For reasons of numbers, if for no other reason, it makes little sense to speak of farm workers being "absorbed" by some existing union. A dog does not absorb a horse. A horse does not absorb an elephant. There are far more agricultural workers in the country than there are members of any union. If farm workers are not entitled to their own union, no workers are.

At the very least, farm workers are entitled to decide for themselves whether they want to have a union they can call their own, or whether they want to be submerged in some existing international union. Farm workers need help badly. But perhaps they do not need it if it is conditional upon their surrendering their freedom to choose between autonomy or affiliation. It is doubtful that farm workers want to become colonials in anyone's labor empire.

From this standpoint, therefore, it is preferable that support come from some coalition of forces within the labor movement -- e.g., the Industrial Union Department, or state labor federations -- rather than from a single union, whichever that union might be. One does not anticipate that the Meatcutters, for example, would give all-out support to the farm labor movement without the expectation that all workers organized would become permanent members of the Meatcutters union.

One trusts that at least some segments of the labor movement will help farm workers in building their own organization for the same reason the mine workers, railroad brotherhoods, and others helped build the major industrial unions, without strings, twenty five years ago: because the existence of vital, new unions makes more secure the position of the older unions, and their members, in society.

B. Because the exploitation in industrial agriculture comes close to 19th Century models, and agricultural workers more nearly resemble a "proletariat" than anything left in our society, for over thirty years the farm labor movement has been something of a magnet for members and camp-followers of a political-economic ideology which proposes to correct injustices at the price of freedom. Farm workers know all about injustice, and not from reading Das Kapital, but from working and living under it, day by day. Nevertheless, it is seriously to be doubted that they think it necessary to sacrifice other values to obtain justice. They do not wish to be manipulated, to be made pawns, to be used as means toward ends, "for their own good," by some "cadre." The Executive Committee of the Northern California Area Council of AWOC, for example, recently adopted a Farm Workers' Bill of Rights which said, among other things:

We are passionately convinced that it is possible for us...to have, at the same time, (both) freedom...and justice. Indeed, we believe you cannot have one without the other. Rather than saying we seek justice and democracy, therefore, it would be more accurate to say we seek justice through democracy.

This proposition puts certain limits on the types of collaboration which would be welcomed by farm workers themselves -- or, at least, by the local which adopted the foregoing policy.¹ Agricultural workers might not feel entirely safe, for example, entrusting their own liberties to leaders who believed the pursuit of economic justice in Cuba and China justifies the strangulation of liberties in those places.

C. If farm workers are given the opportunity to register their opinions on the matter, they will almost certainly prefer support for their movement to come from quarters which have a record and a reputation for honesty and integrity. Among the various potential sources of support which have been mentioned in recent months, some would have difficulty meeting this qualification. It is not necessary to name names.

D. Although one cannot say there is unanimity among farm workers on this score, certain evidence suggests that another limiting factor upon the sources of support which would be welcome is the means or "style" which might be associated with these several sources. The statement of principles referred to a moment ago,¹ adopted unanimously by a group of farm workers in Northern California, said,

We believe that the methods by which an organization pursues its objectives are as important as the objectives themselves. If a union is built through terror, coercion, lying, and cheating, its goals -- however desirable they might have been -- will be poisoned from the very outset. The union will be able to maintain itself only by a continuation of the same methods, and will live in constant dread of a rival which is even more unscrupulous and more clever at lying, cheating, and the use of violence. We therefore propose to employ techniques in our union-building which are consistent with our objectives... Careful respect for such methods may sometimes give the impression that progress is slow. But we shall resist the temptation to compromise our principles, because we know that the union which results in the long run will be the more substantial and successful in yielding the types of human advancement we seek.

¹ A month after this pamphlet was written, the policy statement referred to here was adopted by a much larger and more broadly representative group of farm workers: close to 200 delegates at an Agricultural Workers Organizing Conference in Strathmore, December, 1961.

Some unions have a history of resorting to violence, coercion, and terror when they cannot obtain their objectives any other way -- and sometimes it seems they enjoy using such methods for their own sake. Other unions do not have any such history. These differences in tradition will be a consideration to agricultural workers if they have anything to say about the sponsorship of "their" organizing drive.

E. Above all else, farm workers would prefer that support for an organizing drive come from someone who respects them enough, as sentient human beings, to solicit their ideas and opinions in advance. Running through all the foregoing propositions is a scarlet thread: will farm workers be given the opportunity to choose -- between violence and non-violence; between totalitarianism and anti-totalitarianism; between democracy and non-democracy; between honesty and dishonesty; between autonomy and submergence? Or will such policy decisions be imported, ready-made, from Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, or Washington, D.C.?

Agricultural workers are perhaps more bemused than anything else by the tendency of some people to imagine they have become farm labor authorities by attending a congressional hearing or reading an article. People in the field are bemused by the seemingly endless use people not in the field make of the cliché, "plight of the migrants", when in fact the overwhelming majority of farm workers are not migrants, fewer are migrants all the time, and many non-migrants are in a worse "plight" than many migrants. Farm workers are bemused by the talk of "America's forgotten people" on the part of persons who have never actually met any field laborers, worked with them, or come to know them as rounded human beings.

And farm workers are bemused -- and sometimes something more -- when people design programs "to help the farm workers" in total isolation from the people to be "helped." The list of such programs is a long one, and it includes some very strange bedfellows, who may disagree on everything else, but share the belief that they know what is good for farm workers.

When the Teamsters signed a contract covering certain lettuce workers at Bud Antle, Inc., they did so without consulting any of the farm workers affected. They were criticized in AFL-CIO circles for this. But the AFL-CIO should be careful about the stones it throws. When it decided, in the spring of 1959, to try to organize farm workers, not a single farm worker was asked where he thought the organizing might best be done, when, among whom, by whom, or anything else.

When the California Department of Public Health recently set up programs to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars for "migrant health," it did so in splendid isolation from flesh-and-blood agricultural workers or their representatives. Indeed, designers of those programs scrupulously avoided association with farm labor representatives for fear of incurring the displeasure of agricultural employers.

When the California Department of Industrial Relations (an agency generally sympathetic toward farm workers) set up a study to survey farm labor housing, it did so without consulting a single farm worker or farm workers' representative as to how such a study should be conducted -- or whether there was any point to such a survey at all. When the Council of California Growers (not an agency generally sympathetic toward farm workers) opened a child care center for "migrant children" in Stanislaus County, it did so without consulting any farm workers as to their needs or feelings with respect to child care or anything else -- and then professed surprise when the venture failed.

All of these programs may have stemmed from the kindest of motives. But all, in one way or another, will fail, as the Council of California Growers' program has already failed, if for no other reason than that there is so great a gap between the understandings and assumptions of the upper-middle class, urban, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, educated minds which devise these programs in air-conditioned offices, and the understandings and assumptions of farm workers who are often not Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, or educated, and are never urban or upper-middle class or air-conditioned.

But more than that, such programs, conceived and structured in nearly complete isolation from agricultural workers themselves, deserve to fail, on moral grounds if no other. They deserve to fail because they are all basically anti-democratic. In this respect, there is no qualitative difference between a labor leader, whatever his motives, doing something for or to farm workers, and a grower, whatever his motives, doing something for or to farm workers. What the farm labor movement needs is support from people who want to do something with farm workers.

If liberals and labor leaders who are concerned about farm workers were to get out of the cities for a time, and mingle with some real, live farm laborers, at least two desirable things would result. First, their programs might really start to work for the first time, since they might, for the first time, have an organic connection with the wishes and needs of the people affected. Second, and even more important perhaps, labor-liberal friends of farm workers would find that agricultural laborers are not just so much passive, plastic stuff waiting to be shaped by someone who thinks himself wiser and more capable.

Agricultural workers have ideas, humor, vitality, other qualities useful to labor, liberals, and society as a whole. When friends of the farm labor movement begin to design their programs on the assumption that farm laborers can do things for them, as well as the converse -- i.e., with the assumption that they can do things together, mutually, reciprocally -- then their programs will begin to make both good pragmatic and good moral sense.

Then, farm workers and their friends will have begun, truly, to build a union.

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